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SUBJECT: BELARUS, EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND WESTERN BALKANS:
SWEDISH MFA COMMENTS ON LIKELY GYMNICH DISCUSSION

Classified By: CDA Robert Silverman for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: EU foreign ministers meeting informally in the "Gymnich" format March 27-28 will reach a decision on the question of Belarus' participation at the May 7 European Summit, according to Sweden's senior MFA official dealing with EU matters. A "Burma solution" that has the Belarus foreign minister representing Minsk at head of state meetings is one possibility. On Montenegro, Sweden wants to see the application process go forward now, but Germany and others are opposed, calling for a strategic discussion on all applicant countries first. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a May 26 meeting, Swedish MFA EU Correspondent Magnus Scholdtz told Pol Counselor that Sweden is extremely satisfied with European Council conclusions on the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which make clear that Belarus will be a part of the initiative. The extent of its participation, however, will be determined by the pace of reform inside the country. Scholdtz said Sweden will push for more reform between now and the May 7 European Summit, and insist that Minsk not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It will be important to ensure that no recognition occurs on May 8 either, Scholdtz added, lest Georgia walk out of multilateral aspects of the EaP.

¶3. (C) Sweden is "skeptical" over the possibility of President Lukashenko attending the summit, but is sensitive to the concerns of other EU Member States about the need to maintain a "delicate balance" between carrots and sticks. Scholdtz said he expects ministers will make a decision on the issue tomorrow, possibly along the lines of a "Burma solution" that would entail Belarus, foreign minister representing the government at head of state functions. Scholdtz noted that the Dutch are firmly opposed to Lukashenko's attendance -- indeed, the Hague was opposed to any participation by Belarus in the EaP.

¶4. (C) Over lunch on March 28, ministers will discuss the Western Balkans, Scholdtz said. Sweden wants Montenegro's application to be "dealt with quickly" and wants ministers to task the Commission to produce an avis. Nonetheless, Germany -- supported by the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg -- is opposed to moving on Montenegro now and insists instead that a "strategic discussion" be held with respect to all likely EU applicants, starting with Albania, Serbia and Bosnia. The French, looking for support for their position against Turkish accession, are going along with the Germans, Scholdtz added.

¶5. (C) Sweden thinks the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans offers sufficient guidelines for thinking about enlargement, but Sweden will not insist on a timetable for Montenegro now. In any event, there will be a Presidency declaration on the Western Balkans on Saturday May 28 that will repeat the Thessaloniki points, according to Scholdtz. Foreign ministers from Western Balkan states will be invited

to take part in the discussion on their region; the Kosovo delegation will have placards that only list their names, however, "to avoid rattling Serbian sensibilities."

16. (C) With respect to visa liberalization for citizens of the Western Balkans, Scholdtz said that there is general agreement in European MFAs about the importance of this tool, but that as soon as the issue is considered by interior ministries, objections arise. Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium remain strongly opposed to visa liberalization, he added.

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